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SPECIAL REPORT

THE U.S. GETS TOUGH

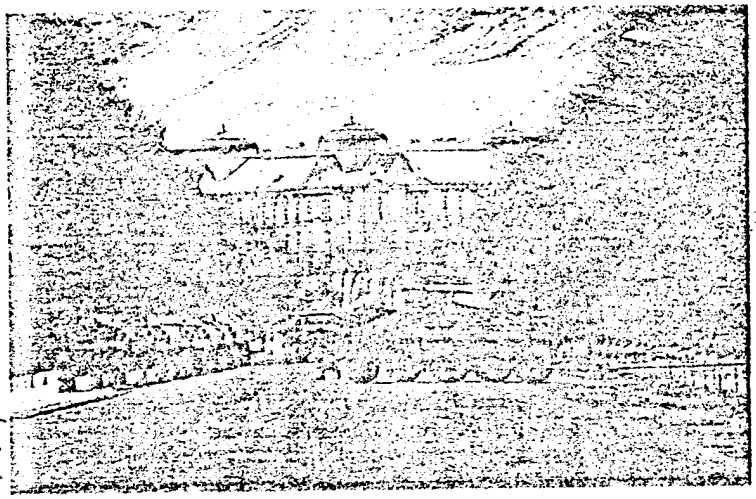
Dinner was over, and the East Room at the White House grew quiet. The guests—80 senior congressmen and senators—craned forward as Jimmy Carter began his briefing on Iran and Afghanistan. The President sat in a Hepplewhite armchair, his foreign-policy counselors arrayed at his sides, a colored map of Southwest Asia on the easel at his back. Roughly 6,500 miles to the east, the 50 American hostages languishing at the U.S. Embassy in Teheran were approaching their twelfth week in captivity. And just over the border in Afghanistan, 85,000 Soviet troops, looking very much like they meant to stay, were clearing the roads westward from Kabul toward the Iran border. So the President didn't mince any words last week. Looking at his guests, he said: "The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is the greatest threat to peace since the second world war."

The language was harsh and perhaps a bit hyperbolic; no Korea, Cuban missile crisis or Vietnam seemed at hand. But transfixed by the unraveling chaos in Southwest Asia, the President clearly meant to change his approach to the Soviet Union. Along the U.S.S.R.'s southern periphery, he sketched the first outlines of a tough new posture. Last week Turkey agreed to let the U.S. continue to use 26 military and intelligence installations on the Soviet Union's southwestern flank. Word leaked out that the U.S. and Egypt had conducted joint air exercises, and that the British had agreed to permit the U.S. Navy to beef up its depot on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. In Washington, the Pentagon was busily ironing out the last wrinkles in plans to acquire new military "facilities" in Kenya, Somalia and Oman. And in Peking, Defense Secretary Harold Brown and China's Deputy Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping were exploring new, "down-to-earth" ways of countering Russian expansionism in Asia.

The assorted military maneuvering ranged from the China Sea to the Mediterranean (map), leading some to wonder whether Carter was dusting off Truman-Eisenhower-era notions of containment. Asked about that last week, a senior Administration official refused to coin a new catchword. "I don't want to talk about drawing lines or not drawing lines," he said. But the President did seem determined to put an end to America's Vietnam self-doubts and to counter the unchecked foreign-policy adventures that have pushed the Soviet Union over the past five years from Angola to Ethiopia to Cambodia to Afghanistan. The most immediate casualty of the new get-tough strategy was Carter's once bright hope of putting arms control ahead of all the foreign-policy objectives. The sea change in Carter's world view promised to carry him farther away from what White House hard-liners deride as "the romantics" of the State Department toward the trust-no-Russians diplomacy favored by national-security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The guns of Kabul: A test for grab-and-hold politics

Henri Bureau—Sygma



SWIPES: The President's manifest intent was to encourage the Russians to think twice before adventuring any farther in Southwest Asia. Toward that end, he tightened his vise economically and diplomatically as well as militarily. In the United Nations General Assembly, U.S. Ambassador Donald F. McHenry nudged the Third World toward calling for the withdrawal of all foreign

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